

Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ sheet is intended to provide a brief orientation to the Historic Design Standards. Please contact preservation@austintexas.gov if you have further questions or feedback about the standards.

1

Why were the Historic Design Standards developed? Don't we already have standards for historic properties?

The Historic Design Standards were developed to clarify existing standards for historic landmarks and National Register districts, and to make the historic district application process easier and more equitable for new districts. The [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#) form the foundation of preservation practice in the United States and are used in Austin to evaluate proposed changes to historic landmarks and in National Register district. However, these very general standards can be challenging to interpret when planning and evaluating specific projects. The Historic Design Standards build on them with more specific standards and illustrations of good practices.

For new historic districts, community members compiling an application currently must hire a consultant or learn how to develop their own design standards, then go through multiple rounds of review with other property owners and City staff. This adds time and cost to the application process—and results in design standards that are nearly identical to those for other districts. The Historic Design Standards will provide a consistent, predictable set of standards for all areas considering historic district designation.

2

I own a historic landmark. How will the Historic Design Standards affect me?

If adopted by City Council, the Historic Design Standards will clarify existing standards for exterior changes to historic landmarks, as well as new construction on landmarked properties. The Historic Design Standards are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation that City staff and the Historic Landmark Commission currently use to evaluate changes to historic landmarks, but they are clearer, more specific, and easier to use for planning and evaluating projects.

3

I own a property in a locally designated historic district. How will the Historic Design Standards affect me?

The Historic Design Standards will not affect previously agreed-upon design standards for existing historic districts. They do align with existing district design standards and may be adopted by property owners within each district if desired.

4

I own a property in a National Register district. How will the Historic Design Standards affect me?

If adopted by City Council, the Historic Design Standards will clarify existing recommended guidelines for changes to National Register district properties. The Historic Design Standards are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation that City staff and the Historic Landmark Commission currently use to evaluate proposed projects, but they are clearer, more specific, and easier to use for project planning and evaluation. They will still be applied on an advisory basis.

5

I'm interested in creating a historic district in my neighborhood. Will I be able to use the Historic Design Standards?

If adopted by City Council, the Historic Design Standards will apply to all newly designated historic districts. They will reduce the time and money required for the historic district application process and help property owners in potential districts clearly understand the benefits and responsibilities of district designation. Property owners in new historic districts may create a supplement to the Historic Design Standards if they wish to add more specific requirements for their neighborhood.

6 What projects will the Historic Design Standards apply to, if adopted?

The Historic Design Standards will apply to the projects that currently go through historic review: exterior changes, additions, and stand-alone ground-up new construction. Work on historic landmarks and in newly designated historic district must meet the standards to be approved, while work in National Register districts will be evaluated on an advisory basis. The historic review process will remain the same.

7 How has the public helped shape the Historic Design Standards?

The working group that developed the Historic Design Standards includes five property owners who would be affected by the standards, as well as five community members with experience creating and implementing historic district design standards in their neighborhoods. A broad swath of community members and Historic Landmark Commission reviewed publicly available draft text in summer 2019 and submitted nearly 200 comments, which are reflected in the proposed standards.

8 What happens next? How might the Historic Design Standards be adopted?

The Historic Landmark Commission will consider the Historic Design Standards on November 16 at 6 p.m. If it recommends the standards, they will be placed on the Planning Commission, Zoning and Platting Commission, Design Commission, and City Council agendas. The City Council is the body that will formally adopt the standards.

We will post an updated schedule of public hearings at www.austintexas.gov/department/historic-preservation under the Current Projects page.

9 How can I provide feedback on the proposed Historic Design Standards?

You can send written comments to preservation@austintexas.gov, which will be compiled and provided to City commissions and City Council. You can also speak at a public hearing at the Historic Landmark Commission, Planning Commission, Zoning and Platting Commission, Design Commission, and City Council meetings where the Historic Design Standards are discussed.

